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Testimony in support of Committee Bill No. 297, An Act Concerning An Amendment to the Medicaid State Plan Under Section 1915 (i) of the Social Security Act to Provide Home Care Services.

Human Services Committee Public Hearing, March 8, 2011

Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Karen Guarnaccia and I am resident of Newington. I am 53 years old and have multiple sclerosis. I am here today to request that you pass Committee Bill No. 297, An Act Concerning An Amendment to the Medicaid State Plan Under Section 1915 (i) of the Social Security Act to Provide Home Care Services.

I am very concerned about access to home care services that can help to prevent individuals who are living in the community from placement in expensive nursing facilities. The Medicaid 1915 (i) State Plan Amendment offers a solution and a way to prevent pre-mature nursing home placement.

My situation is not that unusual; I live at home with my husband and son. I was diagnosed with MS in 1994 and use a power wheelchair for mobility. I am unable to drive so I need assistance getting to doctors appointments and appointments outside my home. While my home is accessible, I have difficulty with everyday tasks that many people take for granted.

I currently receive home health services, which provide assistance with activities of daily living. Activities of daily living consist of things such as showering, dressing, simple meal preparation and assistance with personal care. Currently Medicare is paying for this service, however when this coverage finishes, as it always does, my family and I pay privately for the service.

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Prior to my receiving home health care, it would take approximately 5 hours for me to independently shower and dress. Unfortunately, at the end of a five-hour timeframe I was usually too exhausted to eat or drink. I lost a great deal of weight as well as strength. I was unable to prepare a simple breakfast for myself at the end of that time due to simple exhaustion. As anyone with multiple sclerosis knows, exhaustion creates exacerbations or increases the intensity of the symptoms of MS. It became a vicious cycle.

My husband works full time and is unable to provide daily care. My son who is 23 is also not able to provide assistance with activities such as bathing and using the bathroom. Many times after having been exhausted by a half-day session of grooming and dressing, I would become weak causing me to fall or I would fall during the process of dressing and showering which created its own problems. It became unsafe for me to stay alone during the day.

My parents are elderly part-time Connecticut residents, who can offer very limited assistance. My husband works at a small employer and does not get paid time off so consequently any time that he misses work causes a financial hardship.

I am at high risk of having to move to a nursing home, if any little piece of my routine comes apart. Private insurance many times does not cover or provide assistance with home healthcare. Access to home care under a Medicaid 1915i State Plan Amendment is critical for individuals like me.

I urge the Human Services Committee and the entire Legislature to pass SB 297, An Act Concerning An Amendment to the Medicaid State Plan Under Section 1915 (i) of the Social Security Act to Provide Home Care Services.

Thank you for your time and attention today on this urgent matter.

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